



Detained City Design as tool for Aesthetic Urban living

Kiib, Hans

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Hans Kiib

Deturned City Design as tool for Aesthetic Urban living

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Nikita Kharlamov, Clark University

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Abstracts

In an urban context - there is an increasing need to find adequate architectural responses to urban challenges, where tourism and the experience economy are in focus. New architectural concepts are looking away from modernism's strong attachment to 'form and function' towards 'the sensual and the narrative'.

In large prestige projects you often see that new expressive architecture is coupled with old industrial buildings in order to create strong stories about a future; similar art installations and temporary architecture are emerging providing the audience with spatial experiences questioning the way we are using urban spaces and interact in every day city life.

This article presents concepts of performative architecture and urban scenography. It draws lines back to the artistic and architectural avant-garde in the 1960s. The aim is to evaluate the phenomenon of aesthetic experience in the urban environment and to look at the artistic methods and architectural tools that are involved in large art installations today.

The article pays special attention to the use of temporary architecture in relation to festivals and events. It is an allegation that the temporary architecture provides a special freedom to construct spatial situations that promote an experimental life.

Through symbols, ornaments and decorations it is possible create recognizable urban environments in which people can orient themselves, but also experience an aesthetically and bodily challenging environment.

Through 'constructed situations' and grotesque aesthetics of temporary architectural design it is possible to create cross-border experiences. The thesis is that it may contribute to reflection and provide new demands to the performance of our urban environments in general.

Höhen Rausch in Linz

A late weekend in July 2009 I visited the Cultural Capital of Europe, the Austrian city Linz.

More than one hundred thousand people from the area showed up in the streets of Linz to watch a carnival performance. In adjacent squares street artists, jugglers and small groups of opera singers made the crowd gather while rain showers tried to spoil the fun.

On a rooftop of the museum adjacent to the pedestrian street a big balcony had been constructed. From this people could watch the crowd. The balcony was part of a big art installation called 'Höhen Rausch'. A poster with a man in a flying balloon gondola promised, that this installation would provide you with a surprising experience. An old ferries wheel had been raised on the roof making it possible to be lifted up another 20 meters and experience the city from a bird's eye perspective. Further more a 10 meter long bus had been erected as a tower among all the ventilation pipes explaining, that this installation really would try to make you see the cityscape from a new angle. A series of ramps guided you around and on your way down again you had to pass a shower adding more water to the wet surface. This time, however, your umbrella would convert into a primitive loudspeaker as the water hit the plastic surface with different frequencies. Handels Water Music, The Beatles Yellow Submarine and other well-known tunes would be reviled to your ears passing the different showers.

Safe back on the pavement I had an ambivalent feeling of leaving an art installation similar to a rooftop Tivoli garden. I had just left an installation of sensible landscapes displaying the city as a complex of streetscapes, backyards and technical installations. But what was this? Was this a piece of art providing you with a lot of questions or new perspectives on the city? Or was this just another funscape?

Fig. Höhen Rausch, Linz 2009

Expectations and reflection.

I have to admit to you, that my expectations - related to this weekend in Linz - was biased by my readings on the subject on temporary theme parks and festivals. I had frightened, that this was just another cultural festival where art installations and theatrical performance were to be re-located to public spaces – without really providing artistic experiences.

In 2002 the Dutch researcher Trazy Metz contributed to the discussion on the increasing transformation of inner cities into zones related to leisure and fun. In her book 'FUN', Trazy Metz describes how local people in Amsterdam escape from their homes when millions of people conquer the streets and canals to participate in gay parade, opera festival, marathon run etc:

"Entertainment has conquered the Nederland. Leisure is more than the time that you can spend as you like. It has become an omnipresent culture of fun with an enormous economic importance. Our social identity is determined by the way we spend our leisure at least as much as by the work we do or the possessions we own... We spend an increasing amount of time, money and kilometres on our fun. Never before has the Netherlands had so many events and festivals, so many shopping Sundays, so many parties, second homes, ski slopes, mega-cinemas, kids' paradises and stadiums...the influence of all these activities on our environment is also becoming more visible (Metz 2002)".

On one hand events have become an important part of city life. 'Events break up the routine of everyday life', and events 'provide an opportunity to celebrate life' in general. It appears therefore, that events should be a very important part of cultural planning and in the design of 'a cultural city'. However there is also a backside of this. Different events are often organized by people with different interests or habits and therefore many events can be a burden for the inhabitants living close to or in the middle of the event area. The 'cultural city' is becoming a 'funcape city' (Marling and Zerlang, 2007).

This critical approach also made me reflect on gained experiences during my weekend in Linz. There is nothing wrong with a spectacle designed as a carnival, where people are challenged on their

perception of city life. I really appreciate to be involved in sensory landscapes challenging my senses – my bodily senses, my hearing, my sight and my memory.

However, a fast analysis of the Linz event is that it may not change anything! 'Surprise' is not enough – a bus on a rooftop is special and 'carneval-parades' are fine, but if all cities have it, it leaves the city even more gray the next day!

As stated by a range of critical researchers (Kuntzmann, 2004, Madanipur, 2008, Landry 2010, Skot-Hansen 2010), the danger of staging festivals is that they all contribute to a general festivalization of the city life,

'Every city promotes its own carnival atmosphere, but increasingly they look the same everywhere' (Madanipur, 2008), and

'The problem with these spectacles is also, that the every day life seems even more dull and gray after the circus wagons and jugglers are gone' (Skot-Hansen 2010).

Returned city design

My experiences from Linz lead me back to the origins of the concept of 'détournement' and 'instant urbanism' as it was stated by the avant-garde artists some fifty years ago.

In the 1950's a mentality concerning the role of art and architecture was emerging among artists. Groups of frontrunners evolved around the Frenchman Guy Debord (Lettrist International) and the Dane Asger Jorn (Cobra) were challenging the emerging consumer society. In 1957, 'Situationist International', which became a unifying movement of artists and architects who were critical of society, was formed. The task of the visual arts and architecture was not merely to embellish; the artists were supposed to get involved in the public debate – to question and create 'new and alternative images' of important aesthetical, ethical and moral social issues. The role of art should locate outside the world of galleries and museums. Art was to be moved into the cityscape, the media, politics, festivals etc.

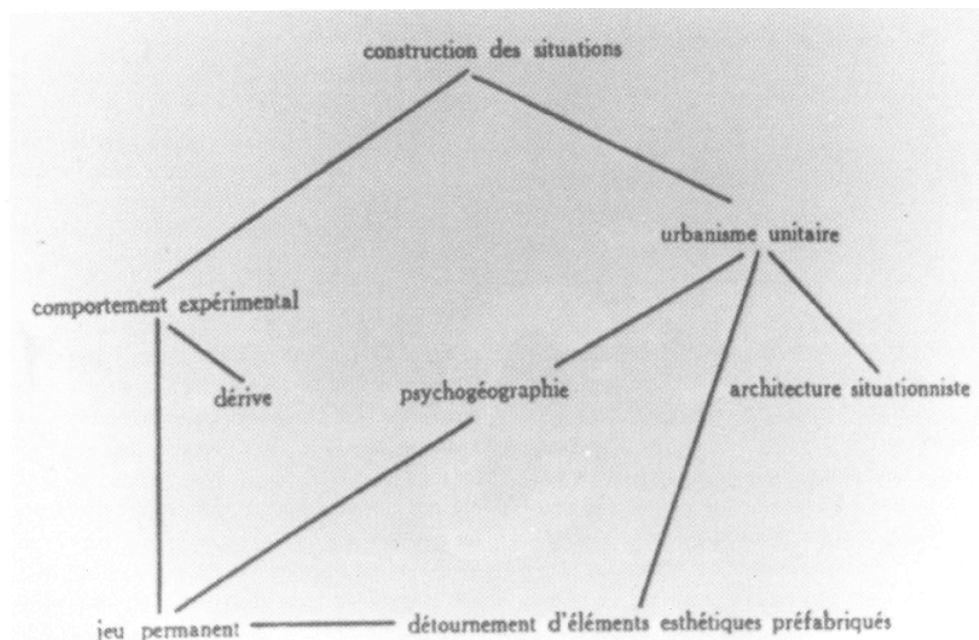


Fig. Debord's diagram of the different genres within Unitary Urbanism, 1959

The situationists communicated their ideas through satire, happenings, 'counter manifests' and utopian proposals for new cities and environments. 'Unitary Urbanism' from 1959 was one such counter manifest. It proclaimed that "Unitary Urbanism acknowledges no boundaries; it aims to form

a unitary human environment in which separation such as work/leisure and public/private will finally be dissolved" (Debord 1959). At the same time, 'Unitary Urbanism' would seek broader and more experimental challenges in city life and architecture – be a manifest for a redefinition of the spaces of the city through participation, games and the construction of situations; architecture was to be infinitely formable and provide flexible, mobile structures with limited lifespan. (Ferguson (ed.) 2007)

The 'Situationist International' became a broad artistic movement with many different subgroups applying a range of different artistic praxis's. In general the tools activated can be clustered into three:

- Experimental behaviour, happenings and plays;
- Dérive and psycho geographic mapping; and
- Situationist architecture.

Experimental behaviour

An important praxis focused on the original statement on 'constructed situations' that could both bring the critique of existing living conditions and also draw up normative hypotheses regarding city life, art and architecture. Along with Debord and Jorn, the majority of the organization claimed that any given constructed situation would bring about a movement and an atmosphere so forceful that it would stimulate new forms of behaviour and yield glimpses of future improvements of social life based on human interaction and play (Sadler 1998). The mission 'to construct situations' should be a noble alternative to creating traditional works of art. It was considered a 'historical necessity' and an escape from the traditional, alienated artistic practice in which the artist was separated from his/her audience.

A artistic tool could be artistic happenings or events. This would take place on the basis of an artistic idea and thus involve the artist, but a keystone was, that this always would involve so called 'spectators'. The 'spectators' would be active participants with an impact on the rules and the content of the play and they would also be active in the transformation of the play.

The artistic event could take place as a theatrical piece in public places taking in the principles from the antique idea of *teatro mundi* (Latin for 'theatre of the world') – based on the idea of life as a theatre performance or an illusion. According to the situationist, the 'performance' and the 'city life' have much in common and thus we should focus on the way we act and interact in public places. We should be looking for the construction of situations characterized by 'disorder' and 'difference' in which people could encounter, interact and perform in new ways and thus be able to exchange perception of situation and gain new understanding of the story in place and the possibilities of new aesthetically experiences related to city life.

In an urban context, the constructed situations could comprise of new plays and games with scenographies, which, in a manner of speaking, turned the city on its head – into '*a deturned city*'. Baroque and awkward situations would attract attention and provide food for thought and also lead to altered behaviours and other types of social interaction. The constructed situations should be perceived as a kind of performance in which all spaces were treated as performative spaces and all people as actors, and artistic success should be measured in relation to a minimization of the avant-garde artist's role in the situation. (Sadler 1998)

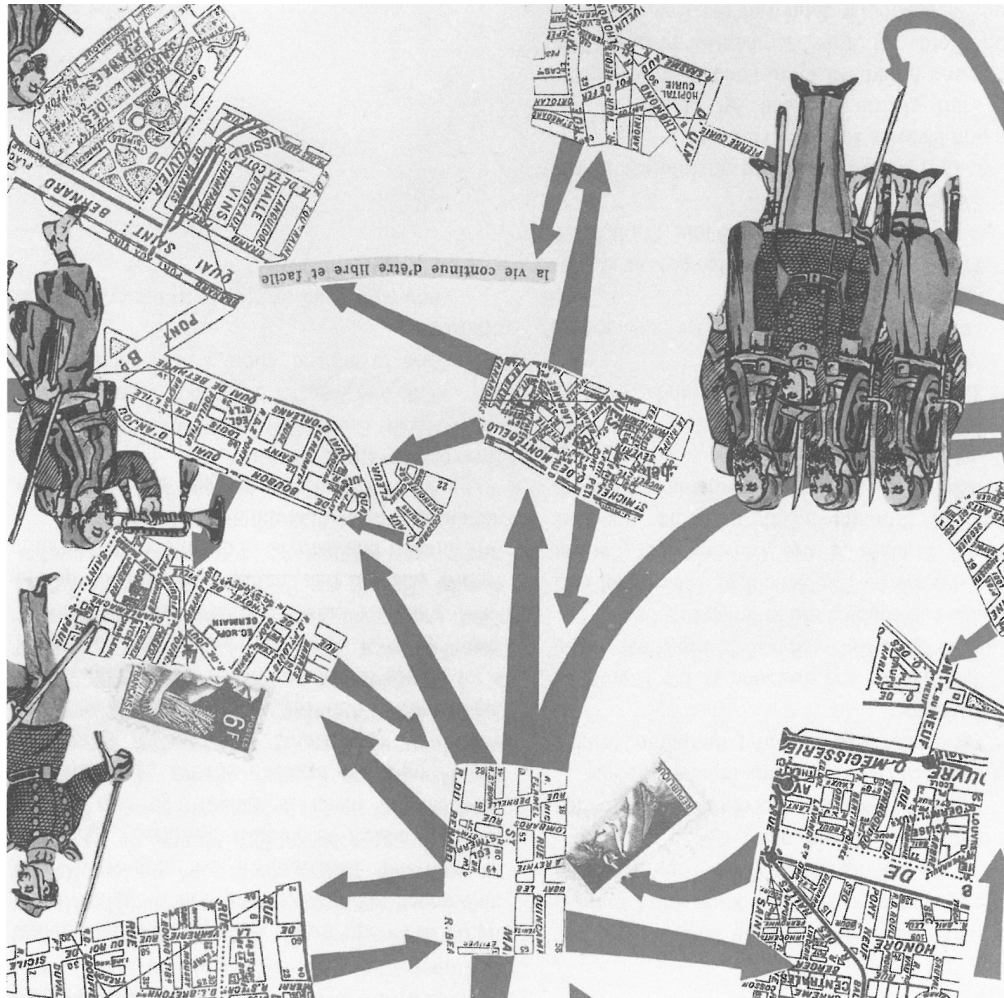


Fig. Debord and Jorn, *Psychogeographic map of Paris*, 1957

Dérive and psycho geographic mapping

Another situationist praxis was '*Dérive*' – an aesthetic strategy for the movement through the city and ways of experiencing the city. Many different approaches could be the motor for this – including specific sounds, a colour, narratives or historical traces. On the basis of unintended movements and experiences it became possible to map different 'atmospheres' in the city and to come up with 'psycho geographic maps' representing individual experiences related to certain areas or places in the urban environment. These maps could also miss the coordinates so it may not be possible to reconstruct the exact positions of the individual experiences.

In this praxis it turned out, that a main focus could be to map 'hidden places' of the city. This could be spaces with no or very little public access: private spaces, production sites, forbidden spaces, crime spaces, waste dumps, or it could be generic spaces without any special attraction or atmosphere including car parks, metro lines, transit terminals and freeways. By mapping the 'hidden places' and maybe adding new dimensions – e.g. adding private functions to the public space or turning the freeway into a semi private space for accommodation - you would add a conflict between the 'normal' and the 'constructed' to the space. The 'atmosphere of disorder' could draw new perspectives to the given perception of the place.

Situationist architecture

A third praxis advocated a need for architectural projects that could confront functionalist urban development models. Situationist architecture should display a new way to integrate the many facets

of city life in a continuum of hybrid functions whilst advocating a pleasure-driven and eventful everyday life.

The most famous project was 'New Babylon', one of many projects on the conceptual works on the situationist' utopian city. In sketches, drawings and large images the painter Constant Nieuwenhuis portrayed urban structures, which would provide a framework for a life not organized according to functions, but which was rather driven by impulsive, liberated actions. 'New Babylon' was depicted in many variations as a mega-structure in the landscape – as a build network over super-sized buildings intersecting each other at odd angles and creating possibilities for combining functions and events in unexpected ways. The city was to be characterized by joy and experiences – 'Ambiance de jeu' (Sadler 1998).

To some extent his work became a very important source for architectural ideas and utopian thinking on urbanism in the 1960's. Especially groups of young French and British architects pursued its critique of the uniform architecture of modernism – which ignored the fact that human needs are different, diverse and changeable – both in exhibitions, events and happenings, and also in far-reaching projects following in the footsteps of the 'New Babylon' ideas. A wave of utopian projects emerged.

Fig. New Babylon, Constant Nieuwenhuis, 1959 - 1969

Yona Friedman's 'The Spatial City' (1959 – 1965) is based on the notion of the eternal horizontal grid that is suspended above the urban landscape. This project became a starter for a movement of French utopian urbanists focusing on the integration of functions and new aesthetically experiences.

One of the earliest concept projects from Britain was 'Fun Palace' by Cedric Price from 1960. The project was described as 'a place' where everyone may 'choose freely': "*Choose what you want to do or watch someone else to do it, learn how to handle tools..., Dance, talk or to be lifted up, where you can see how other people make things work.*" (Price 1960 in Sadler 1998). Fun Palace did not look like an entertainment complex, but rather an enormous, unfinished structure reminiscent of a scaffold at a construction site or a shipyard (Ferguson (ed.) 2007). Its structure, which could be assembled from simple, industrially produced components, could be extended and added to horizontally as well as vertically into an large spatial grid that could harbour many different activities.

Price's ideas have influenced an entire generation of architects. He promoted a structural architecture characterized by openness and the freedom to change. The Archigram group developed his ideas in several projects of smaller scale. The industrial capacity should be exploited, not to homogenize, but for an architectural diversity tailored to localized needs. In the 'Living City' exhibition in 1963 and the concept projects 'Plug-in City' and 'The Capsule' from 1964, they demonstrated how technology and industrial standard components could be assembled in 'unfinished urban structures'.

Fig. Plug-in City, Archigram, 1964

'Instant City' from 1969 looked back to the ideas behind 'the detoured city' and applied them to a mobile, urban structure, which is reminiscent in many ways of festival design, as we know it today. It consisted of a sophisticated set of mobile units - information pavilions, learning environments, cultural scenes, laboratories, exploratories and sports arenas - that could be integrated into existing urban societies. They could be mounted on rooftops or in open fields and function as an additional 'new, innovative layers' to the existing functions of the permanent city. 'Instant City' placed great importance on temporal architecture as a 'learning machine', able to serve as a technological and cultural innovation force in relation to the existing society (Cook (ed.) 1972). 'Fun city' related to leisure had been replaced by 'experience city' related to learning and aesthetic living enhanced by temporal structures and acupunctural cultural interventions.

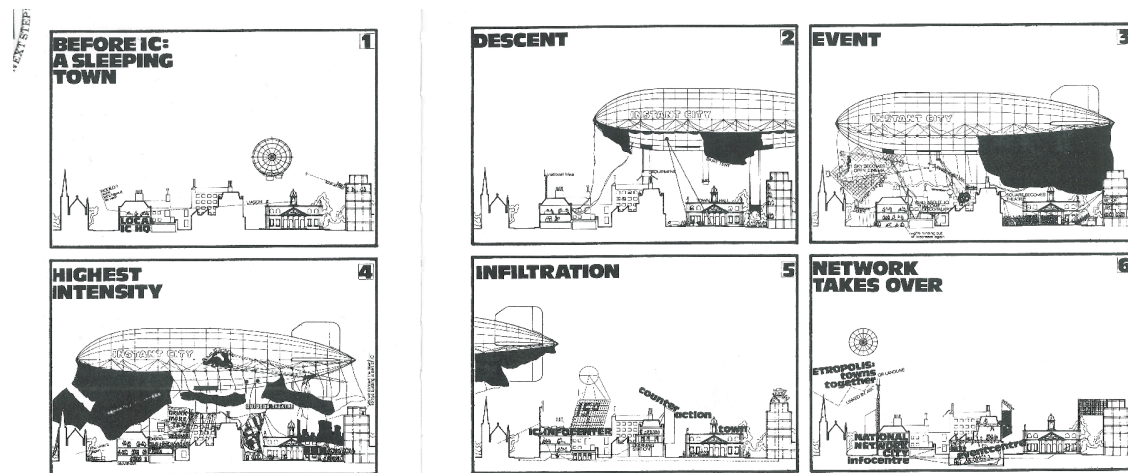


Fig. Instant City Airship, Cook's diagram of Instant City project adding a new cultural layer to the sleeping town, 1969

Detoured city today

None of the mega scale utopian architectural projects were not build. But the ideas behind the situationist thinking related to 'Unitary Urbanism' are very much alive in performance art, urban installations and public space design today. Through exhibitions and counter-planning projects, a new wave of projects has risen under some of the same headings used by the situationists: 'Urban Interventions', 'Dérive Strategies' or 'Instant architecture'.

A group of researchers under the Swiss Architecture Museum have collected a number of current projects that are all based on 'situation construite' in the public sphere (Ferguson (ed.) 2007). They have categorized the collected cases or projects according to their artistic ambitions but also very much in relation to the different focus in the situationist praxis:

- 'Temporary structures' which have references to 'Fun Palace' and 'Instant City',
- 'Urban actions' which have much in common with the general ideas behind 'situation constructed' and 'experimental behaviour';
- 'Urban nomadism' which have a lot of references to floating city dwellers and moving cities;
- 'Movement' (e.g. parkour) and 'Détournement' focuses on the irrational excavation of hidden places or unexpected aspects of city life.

These projects insist on adding alternative features to art in public places, and to provide new perspectives on urban conflicts and on poor life conditions through play, artistic interaction and performative architectural design.

To play experimental behaviour

A lot of projects in relation to experimental behaviour combine two or more elements. 'Add-on 20 Höhenmeter' from Vienna, 2005 is a steel pipe (scaffold) installation with temporary homes, car wash bay, spa etc., which has the appearance of a vertical building where its skin has been peeled off. The 'building' was placed on a public square invited the public in general to participate and to explore. The general structure consisted of different platforms that rose 20 meters high. In them custom made spatial modules interlocked with prefabricated parts that had been imaginatively altered from their original functions. The installation was an invitation to explore new worlds and offered a wide range of views and vistas from various levels. It created the illusion of a vertical compact city where you could accommodate (stay over night) and live in an unexpected and mixed social environment (Fattinger, P., V. Orso, M. Rieper, et. al. ,2007).

Fig. Add-on 20 Höhenmeter, Fattinger, P., V. Orso, M. Rieper, et. al. , 2005

The French 'Exyzt Urban Projects' is a similar project, which was exhibited at the Architecture Biennale in Venice in 2006. It is an inhabited structure in which man publically acts out situations that belong in the private sphere. Here, too, the architecture is a façade-less scenography, a transparent structure, which mercilessly turns 'the private public' and opens up for an experimental social behaviour where 'fiction could be transformed into reality' for a moment or for good. This project has a clear references to the 'Instant City' project from 1969, but it has also references to Dada and Fluxus, and is founded on interaction between people on the basis of principles of 'react and act!'

Dérive - to explore New Europe

Dérive strategies are being up-scaled and added new technologies. The Metropolis project, Copenhagen 2007-2017, attempts to combine street theatre with a critical review on urban policy, city life and people left over after planning. Through art installations and performance in the city, Metropolis highlights questions on what we want with our cities. Applying dérive strategies with physical performance in different urban context it is raising critical awareness on a 'social behaviour', 'urban design policy' and 'aesthetic urban living'. Through performance and street art they tend to give voices to alternative political view related to prioritizations in urban development.

Project Cargo Sophia from 2007 two Bulgarian truck drivers invites for a ride in containers through Copenhagen. On one hand it is a simulated long-distance ride from Sofia to Copenhagen where they never or only rarely have been. On the other hand the truck would bring the audience to abandoned or neglected suburban sites of Copenhagen (Marling, G., Kiib, H., and Jensen, O. B., 2009).

Fig. Cargo Sophia – Copenhagen 2007

The audience was put in a hold by a panoramic window that occasionally was closed and pictures from various European cities projected on canvas from inside. This was true mobile theater - a site-specific conception of European cities and towns in the borderlands. Between video clips, stories from life on the road, the truck drivers opened up to the window at key points of the stories. The performance mixed the realities of the neglected suburban Copenhagen with a lorry driver's experiences in the world through a windshield.

The performance is obviously about Eastern Europe's long-distance drivers and the new European Community. In the enlarged EU a lot of people have become the nomads of cargo transport. They work and live on less than 6 mobile sqm. front of their 40-ton load, less than 25% use safety belt, 350 are injured and 20 die annually in road accidents in Germany alone. Time is money and there should be no empty runs. Paper, meat or steel pipes. Customers order what they need and this flow of demand is transforming highways between the many cities of Europe into 'moving cities' related to a growing flowing population' working end experiencing the New Europe.

With artistic interventions Metropolis is helping participants to raise an architectural counter-discourse and a critical look at the architects' role and power. They make us experience the "residual sites" of the city. The performance want us to discover, experience, sense, learn and recognize - and perhaps ultimately decide on the architectural qualities of that city's diversity of good and bad.

Sensible instant architecture

Instant architecture and performative spaces are very much in focus relation to festivals and exhibitions. In relation to the utopian projects from the 1960's the contemporary projects are far more modest in scale and pragmatic in terms of scale. But conceptually the projects still have strong messages. The architectural office 'Raumlabor Berlin' has carried out a host of projects, which point to architecture as means for social interaction and social emancipation (Maier, J. and Rick, M. 2008).

Fig. 'Kitchen Monument', raumlabor berlin, 2005

They have carried out a number of projects where temporary architecture and scenography play a significant role in community actions. Temporary architecture become art that share a common intention of being involving, inclusive and create a framework for weak social groups. The means include temporary constructions, provocative installations and projects that point to change. A

noteworthy project in this context is 'Kitchen Monument', an enormous, inflatable plastic bubble, which can be placed under a motorway bridge, in a back yard, or in other 'forgotten' or ignored locations in the city. The aim is dialog, debate and social inclusion.

Fig. 'Blur Building' at the EXPO Schweiz 2002 by Diller & Scofidio

An example of a performative architecture is the 'Blur Building' at the EXPO Schweiz 2002 by Diller & Scofidio. The Blur Building is an 'architecture of atmosphere' – a fog mass resulting from natural and manmade forces. Water is as fine mist through 35.000 high-pressure nozzles. A smart weather system reads the climate conditions of temperature, humidity, wind speed and direction and regulate water pressure at a variety of zones. Upon entering Blur visual and acoustic references are erased. There is only an optical 'white-out' and a 'white-noise' of sounds from pulsing nozzles. Contrary to the immersive environments of the lake and the mountains, The Blur Building is weakly defined. Here there is nothing to see and orientation is dependent of our senses. This 100 meter wide and 25 meter tall performative space is totally devoted to the memory of great natural forces and provide an artificial context for a strong experience of being surrounded by a 'white atmosphere'.

Conclusion

Current 'Instant urbanism projects' share the following common traits:

- They treat architecture as an urban scenography;
- They stage 'private' or 'neglected' problems and put them on the agenda, publically;
- They are involving and aim at creating an either physical or emotional aesthetic experience; and finally they rarely take a stand and rather attempt to prompt laughter, reflection or debate.
- They aim at giving the participant an unexpected visual or physical experience that may provoke or change individual and collective behaviour; give pause for thought and, possibly, in extension hereof initiate a process focusing on the given subject.
- They often have a social commitment and an ethic agenda, be it directly or indirectly.

The Exyt project has set up a text, which in many ways is comparable to the Situationist International counter manifesto, 'unitary urbanism', from 1960:

"Be utopian: We want to build new worlds where fiction is reality and games are new rules for democracy. We want to encourage creativity, reflection and renew social behaviours. If space is made by dynamics of exchange, then every body can be architects of our world.

Architecture can expand into trans disciplinary field, where new tools can be explored. Our recipe: Marinate construction with video, music, graphic design, photography and gastronomy, without forgetting to leave space for interaction, freedom, informality and unpredictability. Your project can result in spatial video games, architectural buildings, musical environments and/or thematic food feasts." (Exyt in Ferguson (ed.) 2007)

Instant Urbanism projects often build on a *universal* construction. The structures are open and can be filled up and taken into possession by the participants. On the one hand, the structure services basic physical and social needs; on the other hand, it stimulates a dialog between the user and his/her surroundings due to its accessibility and direct form of communication.

The analyses from the present cases bear clear references to the discussions in the 1960s concerning 'situation construite' and utopian cities. There are many parallels to 'Experimental Behaviour', 'Dérive Strategies', and 'Instant City' projects, which focus on a sophisticated set of mobile units – information pavilions, learning environments, cultural scenes, laboratories and exploratories – integrated into an existing urban society. All in all these 'artistic constructions' represent a 'new learning layer'. Art stages in public spaces contribute to highlighting the ability of the city to connect people in open social communities and offer new aesthetic experiences and cultural practice.

The add-on of 'new experience based learning layers' envisioned by the avant-garde from the 1960's are being reinterpreted. The urban scenography promotes fun, participation and reflection. The aesthetics of these situations are in opposition to the rational organisation of every day life and it is this duality that enables the 'party' to live and makes even the most serious problems manageable. Humour is thus an important part of the performance related to grave, global problems - manmade environmental disasters, refugees of war and poverty, economic exploitation of third world countries in terms of raw materials and labour, industrial poisoning of foodstuffs and, last but not least, social discrimination of minorities. With humour and art as vehicles these projects enable individual and collective engagement.

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Hans Kiib

Architect and urban designer, PhD.

Hans Kiib is professor in Urban Design at the Department of Architecture, Design and Media Technology, Aalborg University, where he teaches and conducts research.

His research is related to urban transformation, performative architecture and methodologies in relation to urban research and design.

He has published a range of books and articles in the field.

He was director of studies in Architecture and Design, Aalborg University from 1997-2005 and since 2007 he has been the head of school of Art and Technology.